

Interview

with

DIANE ENGLISH

May 20, 2006

By Sarah Thuesen

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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TRANSCRIPT--DIANE ENGLISH

Interviewee: Diane English
Interviewer: Sarah Thuesen
Interview Date: May 20, 2006
Location: Charlotte, NC
Length: 1CD; approximately 47 minutes

START OF CD

ST: Okay, this is part two of my interview with Diane English at her home. It's the twentieth of May, 2006. My name is Sarah Thuesen and I'm interviewing for the Southern Oral History Program, the Long Civil Rights Movement project.

Diane, I thought we would first just go back over some of the organizations and activities you've been involved with in the neighborhood. I wanted to get a slightly clearer picture of how it all fits together. You were saying in our first interview that you worked for the neighborhood association. You first became involved with that when you first moved here. That's the same thing as the Belmont Strategy Force. Is that right?

DE: Yes, it's called the Belmont Neighborhood Community Strategy Force.

ST: Okay.

DE: That's our neighborhood association. We just use neighborhood association since the name is so long. I also re-formed the community watch program in our neighborhood in 2000. I also helped redevelop our Community Development Corporation which is our CDC.

ST: The Strategy Force, also known as the neighborhood association, was formed in 1986?

DE: Yes, it was formed in 1986 by another group of people at that time.

ST: Were the folks who sat on that all neighborhood residents or did it include representatives of the city as well?

DE: It's all neighborhood residents and your business owners that have businesses within the neighborhood. No, we don't have any city people that sit on our boards at all.

ST: You became president of that organization at some point, right?

DE: In 2003, I became president of the neighborhood association.

ST: How long is the typical term there?

DE: We have a rotation of three years and then you are re-elected or if at that time, at the end of three years, there is not another person that would be running then you can be re-elected for an additional three years. At the end of six years you have to step down.

ST: Are you currently still--?

DE: I'm currently still there.

ST: Then the Belmont Community Development Corporation, what year did that form?

DE: That was formed--? That was nonfunctioning when I came into the neighborhood in '93. That hadn't functioned in years. As we got involved with the association and the community watch program we became aware of the CDC not functioning. We started a team, a committee, and went forth with the city. The city said, "We'll come in and help you all re-develop your corporations." We spent about a year or six

months going back through the process of reorganizing our whole CDC with new bylaws and assessments and all this stuff. It took us about six months to a year.

ST: So there had been one in the past. It just wasn't functioning.

DE: It just wasn't functioning at that time.

ST: Would you say that the time you were re-forming the group was maybe around 2000 or so?

DE: It was during 2000.

ST: How is the function of the CDC different from the Strategy Force?

DE: The CDC constructs affordable housing. They do a lot of financial business work, like to get people homes, to help them to get qualified. They can do the funding for the home buyers, stuff of that nature. They have been known to do community efforts work also. [Interruption-one of English's grandchildren enters] I'm busy.

ST: Do you want me to pause it for a minute?

DE: Yeah, I'm busy. Go, go, go. It's for something else. Now go back outside and shut the door. Bye-bye. [Laughter]

They have initiatives. The CDC has initiatives that they have to perform in order to stay in existence in a neighborhood which is some of the things we do. We try to do different things so we won't be walking over each other with the same projects. They mainly stick with financing, home buyers and stuff of that nature.

ST: They do have partnerships with city representatives, right?

DE: They do and our CDC just so happen to have to be funded by the city because we did not have funds on our own to actually start it up with. It is being funded through the city. That director is being paid through the city and grant funds.

ST: Are there any other organizations that are Belmont based that I'm leaving out that you have been involved with?

DE: No, we have all kinds in the neighborhood. Basically, they pop up everyday. You hear about them one day and they're disappeared the next day. We do have Right Moves to Youth but that's nonfunctioning. The lady that was running it just fell through the cracks. It's a lot of things that we have that are available but they were given--. Different people took on those responsibilities so it just fell through the crack. When they got tired of it and they couldn't get a whole bunch of responses to it they just dropped it. Now the association is going back trying to pick up on some of these things so that it can distribute it out evenly throughout all the neighborhood so all the neighborhood will be aware of the different programs that we have.

ST: What's the biggest challenge in sustaining an organization and making it last?

DE: Keeping people interested, on the go, motivated. Keeping your residents mainly informed is the biggest problem. Residents have to be involved in order for the association to function properly. We can function all day without the input of the neighborhood residents. It wouldn't be run as an association. It would be more like a group of people running a neighborhood. It should be residents running the neighborhood through the association. The association should be--is the resort to where you go to, to make sure that their wants, needs, and efforts are put forth to wherever, to make sure we are heard, and make sure we running the right direction. We do take a lot of training classes. The city offers a lot of training classes. We find out from other groups of people about training classes. We attend some of those. It's basically a learning situation all the time.

ST: What sorts of training classes have you taken?

DE: Leadership. Management. I went through the Anger Management programs that they have. I went through their resource classes, partnership classes, financial assistance, how to get people interested in participating, organizational training, organizational skill training. It's been several. It's many of them.

ST: So this has really been a learning process.

DE: For me, I've learned a lot in the last three years than I ever have in a lifetime. It's interesting because it's always something new.

ST: Thinking about all of your activism in the neighborhood, who would you say have been your most important allies?

DE: The residents are my most important allies because I can go to them and talk. Without their support you really can't do anything. I think working as a group has more power than an individual's voice. Usually, I talk a lot to the residents and they talk and they talk. I try to put it together in my own words. Sometimes they have a tendency to tell you something but they mean something else. I have to constantly go back and say, "Did you really mean--can we talk about it again before I actually try to find someone--?" I'm good for picking up the phone. We have what they call a neighborhood list of all of your different neighborhoods and presidents and stuff of that nature. If I have a problem I pick up the phone and I just go through those and ask, "Have you ever had such and such thing happen to you? Where can I get some help? What kind of resources?" Usually they are pretty good at it.

ST: So if the residents have been your most important ally who do you see as your most significant opponents in some of the fights that you've tried to push?

DE: The city. The city of Charlotte. They are so huge and they have so many different departments. I think where the break down comes with us is you talk to one person and it lingers. They have to go through a due process to get it to the right person. Then, it lays and that person is so busy doing other things. Right now, it's the city. We're working on them. We have a coordinator which is named Randy Harris. He's good. He's really good, but he's just so tied up and he's involved in so many other issues. It's sort of hard to catch up with him and to sit down and actually do some of the things that we really push to ask him about. But he's good.

ST: What do you see as the ideal role that the local government should be playing, or the state and federal government should be playing in helping people find affordable housing, sustainable neighborhoods?

DE: In the past I've noticed that the state, the city, all these different people are involved in it but they seem to run over the top of each other. Nothing ever gets settled in the neighborhoods. To me, it would be--. I think I read a while back where they said the communities themselves should be able to operate on their own. There should be a way that they could train the neighborhood people to the point where they could go to the state and could pull funds or ask for things that that particular neighborhood needs and obtain those resources without the red tape of going through the city, the state, the gov--, blah, blah, blah and on and on and on.

[Brief interruption as one of Diane's grandchildren enters.] I'm trying to interview right here so stop coming through here please.

I wish they would just put it back into the hands of the communities. It seems to me you have communities that do all of their work within that community. It seems that those

residents are much happier people. They can get things done and they don't have to wait around months to a year for permission for this and for a budget for this. You can just actually go out and do. Usually, it's like the state relays to the city and the city relays to community.

ST: Has the media helped or hurt your work in Belmont?

DE: The media has helped our work because at one point in time we couldn't get any type of outside resource help. I think they had a couple of coverages on us. We just got people from everywhere wanting to come in and help to do things.

ST: Was it the *Charlotte Observer* or the TV?

DE: It was the *Charlotte Observer*, did a big write up on it, on our neighborhood.

ST: After that things started happening?

DE: Yeah, sort of. After we made them happen. We sort of pushed it to happen. We had barricades that were put up in 1998 in our neighborhoods. We sort of demanded that they come down. Well, we asked that they come down because we were told they were temporary for the--.

[Interruption]

ST: I think it didn't catch that last little bit. If you don't mind let me just get you to explain the barricades once more. The barricades were put up to decrease crime.

DE: Crime and to cut down on the trafficking. They said the people that was driving through buying drugs or whatever, which it did help with that part. It did help subside some of the crime in the area. People couldn't drive through to get their dope. My street, as I said, Kennon Street was a very hot street when I moved in here. It was like everybody came Kennon Street to purchase drugs. All your drug dealers used to hang on

Kennon Street. During this, after six years, '98, we approached the city about-- Well, the police department in reference to when would they be taking the barricades down. That's when we were told they are permanent. We are like, well, nobody told us. You told us they were temporary. They could come down whenever. I don't think they wanted them to come down.

ST: So in '98 they had been up six years?

DE: Yeah. We were determined. After six years I'm tired of running the block to get in and out. Then people on this street here would have to take the block to go to one section. It would just beginning to be bugged out. If you're talking about revitalizing a neighborhood--who would want to buy a home in a neighborhood where you got barricades sitting in the middle of the neighborhood. It doesn't look feasible to me. I would be turned off by it. They weren't the pretty barricades. These were some wooden sticks and some red. Then they had some dirt around it where it was supposed to be pretty flowers. The people always stomped the flowers. They always trashed the area. The people on the corner usually had to clean that up, along with anything else. Then the flowers died. It was just horrible. Then the weeds would just grow up. If we didn't cut them, the city never cut them. If you are going to own a piece of property in our neighborhood at least take care of it. We just decided maybe it's time for them to come down if we going to revitalize our neighborhood. That way it would make it more presentable to people just coming through. You'd have more assets in our neighborhoods because we need all the assets-- We have a large neighborhood. We have 3500 people in our neighborhoods. That's a large neighborhood and all of the kids. We just need as much assets in and out that we can get. Everything that happens downtown, the bike-a-thons, the run-a-thons, they all want to run through Belmont

for some reason. If they're running this way we are blocked in at that time. The police department told us that they couldn't take them down. It would cost X amount of money, \$5000, blah, blah, blah. We were like no you didn't tell us we had to pay to take them down. You said they were temporary. This went on for about six months. They had to do surveys to find out-- We did a petition for the residents to have it taken down. The police decided, "Well, we need to do our own survey. It may just be because you people that live on the corners, that it's bothering the most. The other residents see it as a help still." We outbided them. We had more petition names than they had. They finally--it took them another six months to come up with the monies to take the barricades down which we had one at Kennon and Parsons. We had one at Kennon and Olmstead.

ST: So two different places?

DE: Yeah, but they are both on Kennon. You go down Kennon and these are the side streets coming from Parkwood over on to Kennon Street. Kennon was your hot spot.

ST: When did they finally come down then?

DE: It took them until 2001, I believe. I think they took them down like in 2001 or 2000. I really can't remember that date. It took us almost a year before they brought them down.

ST: What was the effect of taking them down?

DE: We had the news media press. They came and did this big write up about it. I don't think--the police department didn't like it too well. They were invited and they were here. They just wanted to make sure that that was the thing we needed to do to keep down the traffic and the drug problem. So far we've done that.

ST: Without the barricade?

DE: Without the barricades. It was going to happen anyway without the barricades. To me, it helped the traffic flow at that time. Nobody was really into the community watch program. A lot of people over here were afraid to call 9-1-1. A lot of people didn't communicate that they felt unsafe. They would just stay in their houses. At night they wouldn't come out. You couldn't sit on your porch or entertain because of the gunfire and the drug dealers standing around and robberies, just anytime. After the community watch program went into effect and they knew that it was a lot of people signed up for it. I think it slowed down the crime a lot. We felt more at ease really.

ST: Why were folks previously afraid to call 9-1-1?

DE: Because it was so prevalent, the drug dealers were so prevalent in the neighborhood. These are people that were born and raised in this neighborhood. They actually lived in the neighborhood. Some of them were just--. Some of your elderly people, they would help them out financially. If you're getting some type of financial assistance that you don't ordinarily have you might have a problem with you calling 9-1-1. I didn't know of anyone in particular that it happened to. That is what we were told by some of the police officers. Maybe some of these elderly people are being assisted because the drug dealers hung out on their properties. I think they just hung out because they knew those people. They felt safer on their property. I don't think they were--you know, okay, you can hang out here. It just happened that way. Like my house, it just happened. I never said it's okay. You could tell them and it would be, "Okay, not today." Then they would be right back that same evening. They were even double. It would be two or three and the next thing you know it would be fifteen, twenty of them. So what do you do then? You don't go out fist fighting. You don't go out hollering and screaming. If you dial 9-1-1 back then at that time-

-. We had a lot of problems with the officers--. I don't know if it was the dispatch system they had. You would call for 9-1-1 then the officer would knock on your door. It was almost like the drug dealer standing here and the police knocking on your door. You talking to them and the next thing you know you got flat tires on your car. I went through about twelve flat tires. It was like a ordinary thing, you know, from people, flatten your tires.

ST: You suspected these were drug dealers who did this?

DE: I have no idea. It never fazed me as to why. I knew it had to do something with me working with community watch and just walking the neighborhood. Everybody knew me. I don't think it was any of the drug dealers. It was nothing really going on. I would talk to them just like ordinary people. I respected them and they started respecting me. I had no problem. I think it was more--maybe some kids or something like that. Nothing big. I dealt with it and kept going.

[Pause]

ST: Do you talk with your children and grandchildren about your activism?

DE: They are a part of it. They were here. My kids were actually living here when we moved in. Well, one of my daughters was. The other one came later. They stayed for a couple of years. They actually participate in a lot in it. They go to a lot of the training. My two daughters go to a lot of the training. My grandkids are--from the Belmont Diamond Youth Council.

ST: What does that group do?

DE: It deals with kids, at risk youth. What we do is try to keep them occupied with healthy things. We try to take them out of the neighborhood. We try to teach them about art. We take them to--maybe send them to art classes, see some of the things that's not

what you see in your neighborhood all the time. We let them know there is another life outside of the crime, the neighborhood being in the shape that it's in now. There are other people and there are other places that you can go.

ST: Where have you taken them?

DE: They have went swimming. They love to go swimming. We take them to the aquatic center. We take them to the movies. We took them to a farm, some kind of animal farm up in--way out in the country where you have all these animals and horses. We spent the day there so they could see the animals in the woods. They love country life. I don't know why they love country life. I guess because the kids there had motorbikes and all this stuff. They didn't have to worry about cars and stuff of that nature. We've taken them--. They've had martial arts. They took martial arts for three years. They have done a little bit of everything now. Usually, we started out with about thirty children and as we went through they've sort of dwindled. Most of them have moved out and the ones that were involved either pulled out or just got disinterested during the last year or so. They really don't want to stay situated. Sometimes you have to be situated in order to grow. We don't think taking you to a movie, ice skating, and roller skating is the best of all things to be doing all the time. You can learn other processes, how to organize. We are trying to get him into some of the youth leadership programs. Shamario, my oldest grandson, is the president.

ST: So, it runs in the family.

DE: Yeah. He's just that type. He likes to know things about what he's--. He's nosy. He loves to go to all of the meetings that I go to, goes to the training, some of the trainings I have. He's learning. That's good.

ST: What would you most like your children and grandchildren to remember about your own work in the neighborhood?

DE: That there is a good side to everything. It may not look good at that particular time because they're always on my back: "You really need to drop all that and just let it ride." They would prefer me to just shut the house down and just move, just come and live with them. That way you can save your money. You don't have to worry about fixing that old house. You don't have to worry about them people running around with guns. You don't have to worry about the grandkids getting hurt, blah, blah, blah. They would love to see me just shut it down and move on.

ST: What keeps you from doing that?

DE: My individuality. I want to be an individual. I don't know. I just like to speak out about things. I feel like if nobody ever speaks out about it. It just goes undone. That's how we've gotten this far. Somebody took the initiative to speak out. If nobody speaks out where we going? No where. We are going to stay stuck. Stuck like glue in the same spot. I can voice my opinion, not even living here; I can voice my opinion which I always will regardless if I'm here or anywhere. I have a voice and I do use my voice. I do a lot of research before I use my voice. It's not like I offer a spur of the moment speech. If I'm going to talk about something I'm going to go research it first. I like to be right when I speak out. That's why I don't classify myself as an activist because I do research first. I think activists go on impulses more so than they do--they probably do, do research. All the ones that I know they are like, it's an impulse thing. They feel it. It comes out. They work at it and they solve it. Me, I like to go back. I like to read about something. I got to ask

somebody something. Then I'll feel more comfortable. If I know what I'm talking about then I can relay it to you better.

ST: What would you say, thinking about all your years working in the neighborhood, is your proudest accomplishment?

DE: Proudest accomplishment. I've had a lot of those I think. When I first did the community watch program, I didn't feel comfortable because it was my first experience trying to form and organize stuff. The best one was when I actually--being the president for a while it was like we could do this. We've accomplished a lot of things. Right now, I'm at that point to where it's nothing that the community people talk about that I don't feel like I can accomplish for them. I guess you call me a go getter, a fighter, more so than an activist. I'm a fighter. If I believe in something I'm going to question it to the last resort. If I can't get the answers there I move on until I get the answers. I never leave any stones uncovered. I never burn my trail, so I can always go back. It's like a dog covering a bone and he'll go back and get that same bone and continuously work on it until it's completed. That's the way I am. I like to complete a task when I start it. I like to complete it.

ST: What's the biggest task right now that you see as incomplete in the Belmont neighborhood?

DE: Getting our revitalization plan to the point to where we feel comfortable that this is what is going to work in our neighborhood. We know that there are other businesses, like the Hope VI and all this stuff that got to combine into it. We understand that. We want to see that the plans, the year that six of us went to meetings twice a week for a whole year to set this plan together, we want to at least be--. We want people to know that we didn't waste our time. We felt like right now we wasted a lot of our time in these meetings and for it not

to go any farther than where it has gone. We see more effort put into the Hope VI, which came along later and was reinstalled into our plan, than anything that we set for a year to get started. We haven't seen any of that work start yet. We hear that they are in the process. It's going to take time. We know this. If you can start Hope VI, then you should have started something of ours. Give us something to show an effort that we didn't waste our time for the time we was there.

ST: Of that revitalization plan what piece of it are you most interested in seeing enacted?

DE: The main part that we were worried about were the homeowners that were already here. The taxation. We know that it's going to be renewed. We know that the tax is going to go sky high. We already know. We wanted to get some kind of tax abatement program put in place whereas it would give the home owners that were here during the time that the plan was written, not your new home owners, but the ones that have been here five, six, ten years that have been fighting this length of time, give them an opportunity to put some funds aside to catch up with the tax increases that we have had. That hasn't happened. We had a double tax increase all of a sudden. You have a lot of people here with fixed incomes. It's not elderly--they say medium to low incomes. We probably got medium incomes but before everybody's income was about the same. With the elderly living on their own, in their own homes we know they can't pay double taxes on their properties. We know they have this taxation program if you're sixty and make \$19,900 a year you can get a tax break. If you worked a good job and retired you going to get more that \$19,900. It's not helping them either. We continue to work on something even with our attorney.

ST: Is this Ted Fillette?

DE: No it's not. His name is Paul Steffens. He's with Kennedy and Covington. Then we are working with the state level trying to see if they could work something out through congress or whatever. Give us like a tax program where we could--. We feel like we're going to lose one way. We're not going to lose from somebody snatching our houses up, unless it's the tax collector or your mortgage company. That's one reason why we did decide to have attorneys working with us. You have foreclosures going on right now quite frequently. If you can't pay your taxes we know they can eventually foreclose on your properties and seize your properties. Hopefully, we can put some fire there and say you may take the property but it won't be an easy task for you to take properties in our neighborhood. We feel like that's one thing that's going to come. You know you are going to you're your \$100,000 homes, your \$200,000 homes. You're going to have your tax increases but you have to realize there were people here before it started. These are the people that brought this neighborhood for you to come in and take over. The crime is down now due to some of the things that we as homeowners done before you even got here. At least give us some type of--. We're not looking for a big reward, at least give us a tax break. That would be a great reward so that we would be able to keep our homes. A lot of people are not planning to keep--they know that they are not going to be able to keep their homes.

ST: What does home ownership represent to you?

DE: It represents a big part of your life. It's like something that your parents didn't have when they were growing up or had the opportunity. My parents never owned a home. They always were renters or share croppers. Most of my friends, they own homes and it's like, to me, when I became a home owner it was like a different step. It made me feel like a different person. You have a whole different outlook on life. You feel better.

You feel like you've accomplished something. When you pay your mortgage you feel like okay this will be mine sooner or later. Maybe later, but at least it's an effort. It's something to work hard at. You have to have something in life to work toward or else you'll get bored stiff really. To me, I get bored easily. I have to keep busy. I have to constantly keep busy. I can't sit. I read then I get tired of reading, then I get bad about working on this house. I will paint this room one day then I'll come back and change the color the next day. My kids say, "I don't know what color to expect in the house." That's why I can't put drapes because one day it'll be green. The next day it'll be red. It just depends whatever paint I find and I like the color. That's one part I like about being a homeowner. I can change my paint. I can paint any color I want to paint. I can do whatever I want to do to it. Nobody has the right to say you can't do that to your walls. Or you can't plant that in your yard. Home ownership is the way for me. I wish more people would think that way.

ST: It's a way for you to express who you are.

DE: Yeah. It makes you an individual. I don't know. Homeowners don't usually stick out in a neighborhood. You can't really ride through and tell who's a homeowner and who's a renter really. That's the way I think it should be to a certain extent. In the past, the homeowners you could tell because it was the way the property was kept up versus some of your rental properties, not all of your rental properties, just some of them. You could tell the difference in them. Now it's sort of hard. Sometimes you can put your finger on some renters in the neighborhood but then sometimes you can't. We all are different.

ST: Just by way of sort of wrapping up I wanted to ask you a few broad questions. We had talked about the Civil Rights Movement a little bit yesterday. Some people would

say that in 1968, when Martin Luther King was killed, the Civil Rights Movement ended. Would you agree or disagree with that statement?

DE: I disagree. He started it. From his starting it others took on. It progressed afterwards. It never will stop. It's going to always be progression in Civil Rights. We are still fighting some of the same things that was in '68 are here now, but just a little bit more hidden. For the last two years, I've been noticing a lot prejudice being shown out right. It's not being hidden like it used to be. It's more obvious now. They try to cover it or pretty it up but it's still some out there. It's still ongoing.

ST: Where do you notice prejudice most still today?

DE: Some of your jobs, some of your employers. They don't actually come out and say it, but you can look at some of the promotional type things that they do within the company. Then you have the movies that are just average now on TV, racial type things, this mainly. Then in the school systems, I've noticed. Some of the schools are letting the kids read more racial material now. We talk about maybe putting more black history into the school, but it's more racial type things. It's like the old books what they read-- Shamario, my grandson, in fact is one of the one's that brought it up. He brought it up to me in reference to--what's some of the books you all are reading now in school?

SHAMARIO: Well, most of the books we read are racial. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, *Sea Biscuit*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. () Oh, and the Holocaust.

DE: So, it's a lot of racial type things that they are having to go back and read them. Why would you have to read them now, where you have all of this immigration stuff going on? I'm thinking is this another way to bring about uproar or uprising or something. It bothers me that my child is reading--I know those are history type books but at the same time

I think he can read other things that were done that weren't so racial. There are lots of nice books out there that aren't all racial. [Pause]

ST: These books that are being assigned in school do you think it's possible that they are being assigned to stimulate dialogue about race?

DE: I think it's more about the dialogue because than actually that some of this was an accomplishment for us. The dialogue really for them is something like slang. They can't relate to some of the word because it's written in--what do they call it--the off brand conversations I call it, like "ya", "you know" and all this type of stuff. We are teaching them a different language, like to speak a complete sentence. Why go back and give them these other words to try to comprehend? He has a lot of problems trying to comprehend. What does that mean, those words? I'm like let me read it to you because I can talk like that. Let me read it to you so you can comprehend it. To me, I can't understand why they are reading them.

ST: You wish that children had more books that showed them positive images of African Americans, is that--?

DE: Yeah. It is some positive stuff that we have done out there. If you want to give them that history, give them positive history, not something that every time a student says something out of the way a white versus a black, oh that's racist. What else would you think if they are reading these type books about racism? Why wouldn't they go, "This is racist. You racist, blah, blah, blah." This is the whole thing that he talks about that goes on at his school. It's not right. [Interruption to answer the door]

I really think racism is going to be here forever. That's a lifetime thing. It's just a matter of people being able to deal with it and move on. A lot of people have learned to deal

with it and keep moving. I don't feel like it's hindering--. It didn't hinder me any. It just made me stronger. It made me work harder to succeed in whatever I want to do.

ST: What in your mind is the best way to teach that to kids, to teach them how to move on?

DE: I think by reading positive material, giving them a positive outlook on life, letting them see other sides of life. It doesn't have to be surrounding around a bunch of racist type things. They are going to face it anyway if they grow old. They going to face it one day. The best thing for them is to employ them and let them know this is what has happened. This is what can happen. It's okay to read those books, but let them see this is what some have done already. This is what can be done. This is reachable. This is a goal that you can achieve. That doesn't matter about where you came from, how you got here but this is a goal that you can get to. A lot of kids like that. Some of the kids are confused. They don't know what they want to be when they grow up. Well, if I be this then they won't give me a promotion. That's the wrong attitude. I think parents need to work harder on their children's attitudes, impressing that it doesn't matter about now. Think about tomorrow. Your tomorrows are not promised to you, but at least it's a dream. It's a thought. It's a good thought. We can dream. Nobody can take a dream from you, can they?

ST: What has most surprised you about how Charlotte's changed in your lifetime?

DE: The fact that the buildings is multiplied, and the roads are still the same. The highways are still the same. The people, it has grew with population, the different groups of population. It's great. I love it. The lifestyle downtown is beginning to be horrendous. I'm almost thinking I might need to move back to the country. It's so busy, constantly busy, busy, busy, the whole time. You really don't have anywhere to have privacy. When I say

privacy--kids have to have room to grow. If everything is hustle and bustle, cars parked, they can't ride bikes. They can't ride motorcycles. The dogs can't play because you got people everywhere that it sort of hinderous for a neighborhood, to me unless everybody likes to live in a condo. I don't think everybody likes condos. I don't. To me, it's too confined.

ST: Are there changes that you expected to see in Charlotte by now that haven't happened?

DE: Yeah, as far as I would love to see--. [Interruption to answer the door]

ST: I was asking what changes you maybe expected to see by now in Charlotte and haven't.

DE: Not really. I've seen some improvement as far as the races. It has become to a level where people can move on. I've seen that it has happened and it still continues to happen. People just have to work harder at being people instead of looking at people for a color. It's just people. I look at people, just people. It doesn't matter the color of your skin or how you talk. Preferably if you could speak English I can understand you a little bit more. If not, I've gotten to the point where I can understand Spanish a lot. I ride a lot of those on my bus. They are okay people, just people being people. If everybody would just be normal then it would probably be better.

ST: Is Charlotte a better place for your grandchildren than it was when you were growing up here?

DE: Yes. It has more to offer, much more to offer than when I was growing up here. It was more solitude. You were confined more so to what you could do and how you could do it. Now, it's more open. There's a lot of stuff out there available to kids and to people that can better society. They just have to learn where those resources are.

ST: Well, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you wanted to talk about?

DE: No, I think we've covered all of it. Not too much.

ST: Thanks so much for being generous with your time.

DE: Oh, one thing. They need to add more black history.

ST: To the school?

DE: To the school system and it needs to be more black history sections in our libraries, not all of the racist type. They need to add more positive black history. We do have some famous black people that are not noticed enough. We know that they are there.

ST: Do you remember being taught black history when you were going through school? Did your teachers teach that?

DE: When I went through school there was no such thing as black history, none. You learned about Lafayette, somebody that you never knew but you fell in love with because you had to read about them. I never knew about black history, nothing about blacks. The only thing I ever knew was what I was singing and what I was told about. I never read about any. It was never in the school system.

ST: You say what you were singing, did you learn something about black history through music?

DE: We did. That was the only thing we could learn as far as black history. We didn't learn it in school. They didn't play it in school. We did it at home.

ST: In church?

DE: In church. In school it was all white history which was Lafayette, (), and what was the other people, Christopher Columbia, oh god. These were the only people I knew about really, unless I went out and--which I did. My parents would tell me about other

black type things. Me and my friends would talk about it. As far as reading it and seeing it in school, no. But I think It would be good. They started this thing talking about black history month. I really don't see the positive part about why one month. Why not a whole year? They had history all year right. Why can't it be incorporated? Maybe not as much but maybe a little at a time to let the kids know there are some positive black history. There were negative. They knew all of the negative black history, so give them some positive black history. All of our history is not negative. It's some positive stuff that we have accomplished.

ST: That seems like a good place to stop, a good note to end on. Thanks again.

DE: Why, thank you for having me.